Strategy Research Project

AFGHANISTAN AND OPIUM – CAN THE US MILITARY DO MORE?

BY

COLONEL RICHARD G. KAISER
United States Army

USAWC CLASS OF 2008

U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. REPORT DATE	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED
15 MAR 2008	**Strategy Research Project**	**00-00-2007 to 00-00-2008**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
Afghanistan and Opium Can the US Military Do More?	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
Richard Kaiser	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
U.S. Army War College ,122 Forbes Ave.,Carlisle,PA,17013-5220	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
See attached

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			
unclassified	**unclassified**	**unclassified**	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**30**	

The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle State Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

AFGHANISTAN AND OPIUM – CAN THE US MILITARY DO MORE?

by

Colonel Richard G. Kaiser
United States Army

Richard Smyth
Project Adviser

This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Colonel Richard G. Kaiser

TITLE: Afghanistan and Opium – Can the US Military Do More?

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 21 March 2008 WORD COUNT: 6,128 PAGES: 30

KEY TERMS: Narcotics Cycle, Opium Poppy, Eradication, US Forces

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

It is all too clear that there is a linkage between Afghanistan's drug lords and the Taliban and other anti-government extremists. Public statements indicate that this has been recognized strategic levels, but the linkage has not truly been acknowledged at the operational and tactical level. As a result, US military forces have provided relatively limited support to counter-narcotics efforts. There are frequent misconceptions about the ability of US forces to execute counter-narcotics operations. Department of Defense policy allows US forces to participate to a great extent and what is now needed is a refocusing of US military operations in Afghanistan to prosecute counter-narcotics efforts to the maximum degree allowed. US forces can and must do more to stop Afghanistan from falling into a narcotics abyss.

AFGHANISTAN AND OPIUM – CAN THE US MILITARY DO MORE?

There is a growing and clear recognition that the opium and narcotics trade in Afghanistan threatens to further destabilize that nation and undermine all the progress which has followed since the US invasion in 2001. Calls from every corner decry the scourge of the opium trade in Afghanistan. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa calls the Afghan opium situation "grim".[1] Retired General Barry McCaffrey, the former American "Drug Czar" calls Afghanistan "the biggest narco-state in the history of the world."[2] Most poignantly, Afghan President Hamid Karzai states in his foreword to the Afghan Drug Control Strategy:

> Each phase of Afghanistan's recovery since the December 2001 Bonn Agreement has been characterized by particular dangers and unique opportunities. None of these, however, match the peril posed by the resurgence of the 'opium economy', which grew to unprecedented levels in 2004. As the Bonn Process draws to a close, rather than permanently opening a door to a new era for Afghanistan's development, the opium trade threatens to reverse our accomplishments and drag us back into chaos, criminality, and abject poverty.[3]

There are many institutions and organizations working to end the stranglehold opium has on Afghanistan, including the US military, although the military role is somewhat restricted due to law and policy.[4] In order to better understand what improvements can be made in the fight against narcotics, and opium in particular, it is important to first understand the nature and scope of the opium problem in Afghanistan.

Framing the Problem

The "opium economy"[5] cuts deep into virtually every facet of Afghan society, from a cultural, economic, and political perspective. Although a relatively small but growing

portion of the population is involved in cultivating opium poppy – estimated at 14.3% - opium's presence affects almost every Afghan in terms of security and stability.[6] It should be noted as well that not every Afghan Province has a problem with opium growth, and in fact a many are declared opium free.[7] Despite that, the associated instability and associated risks to Afghanistan as a state affects nearly all.

Culturally, opium cultivation and use is forbidden, or *haram*, in Islam. That being said, Afghanistan has a long history of opium cultivation, mostly out of perceived necessity that seemed to peak during the Soviet occupation; Soviet forces decimated many vestments of the economy and the agricultural countryside forcing Afghans to seek alternate sources of income. After the fall of the Soviet occupation, stability was still nonexistent, and many farmers maintained a reliance on opium to survive, despite it being haram.[8] Some Afghans who grow opium feel it is okay to merely grow it, if they themselves do not use the opium as an intoxicant. When asked by NBC News Correspondent Jim Maceda if it was acceptable for Afghans to grow poppy, one opium farmer shrugged his shoulders and casually said that "if Westerners want to smoke opium, they can do what they want. For us it is a matter of survival."[9] Unfortunately, for many Afghans, this anecdotal attitude is pervasive.

Economically, opium is a true bumper crop as Afghanistan has a climate well suited for growing the *Papaver somniferum*, better known as the opium poppy. The opium poppy is fairly weather resistant and is not affected by many diseases, and with Afghanistan's climate, some areas can double crop in one yearly cycle.[10] The economic statistics associated with opium poppy are staggering. In the Congressional Research

Service' report to Congress in 2007, the following facts are directly extracted and highlighted:

- Opium poppy cultivation took place in 21 Afghan provinces in 2006-2007. The land area under poppy cultivation rose by 59% to 165,000 hectares in 2005-2006 (equal to 3.65% of Afghanistan's arable land).

- The 2006-2007 opium poppy crop produced 8,200 MT of illicit opium, a 34% increase from the prior season. Crop yields improved 15% due to better weather conditions.

- Approximately 509,000 Afghan families cultivated opium poppy in 2006-2007, a 64% increase from 2005 and equal to roughly 3.3 million people or 14.3% of the Afghan population. Over 500,000 laborers and an unknown number of traffickers, warlords, and officials also participate.

- The estimated $1 billion farmgate value of Afghanistan's 2006-2007 illicit opium harvest is equivalent in value to approximately 13% of the country's licit GDP. Trafficking proceeds may exceed $2 billion. Many licit and emerging industries are financed or supported by profits from narcotics trafficking.[11]

Embedded in the staggering economic statistics, illicit money transfer is equally important in a cultural and forensic way. Most of the monies from illicit opium trade go through the traditional, yet informal South Asian money transfer service system known as *hawala*. While *hawala* is an ancient institution, it received a boost when its commercial banking competitors were unable to operate in the war-ravaged economy, and still accounts for the majority of throughput for transferring money into and out of the country.[12] It is difficult if not impossible to determine how much of the monies that transit through the *hawaladars* is licit or illicit, due to the quasi-underground nature of Afghanistan's economy. The traditional and unregulated nature of the *hawaladars* further complicates forensic efforts to track opium related finances, making it extremely difficult to go after the drug lords, traffickers, and anti-government elements (AGE) that are financed by narcotic profits. [13]

Analyzing the figures noted above, it is readily apparent that opium is deeply intertwined into the Afghan economic and financial system; therefore any efforts to completely eliminate the opium trade must consider the economic impact and/or alternatives to keep the fledgling economy stable.[14] Many recommendations in this matter have been put forth by international organizations, as well as by the US Agency for International Development under the “Alternative Livelihood Program”. Alternative development is a key pillar in both US and Afghan strategies, as will be shown later, but it is not the purview of this paper to go into significant detail on that particular matter.

Opium and its associated corruption are thoroughly entrenched into the political fabric of the country; given the role of opium in the economy, it is hardly a stretch to imagine how deeply the opium trade’s tentacles reach into the Afghan political system. Allegations of political involvement begin at the district and provincial level and culminate all the way up at the Presidential level. “Narco-corruption is present at all levels of the Afghan government. Executive branch officials, legislators, police chiefs, and governors have been implicated in trafficking, enabling, bribery schemes, and related narco-corruption.”[15] Whenever the topic of poppy eradication arises, local political leaders often mention how difficult it is to persuade villagers to stop growing poppy when it is well known that numerous Parliamentarians grow poppy and “nothing is done to them.”[16]

The Anti-Corruption Road map for Afghanistan notes that “A particular problem in this regard is drug-related corruption, allegedly involving senior Government officials, which interacts destructively with corruption in the security sector (especially the police) and justice sector. And finally, corruption in Afghanistan, which is morally rejected on

the grounds of being against the basic principles of Islam, further undermines the social fabric and erodes trust, possibly contributing to persistence or resurgence of conflict."[17] All counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan must acknowledge the breadth and depth of political corruption associated with opium and "progress" must be measured within the bands of this corruption.

Taliban, Anti-Government Elements, and Opium

Any attempts to paint the Taliban as anti-poppy for religious purposes is not realistic, although it sells well in a romantic sense at local levels. Since 2001 there has been ever increasing evidence that the Taliban and other anti-government elements have developed a symbiotic relationship with the drug lords, and have turned towards active participation in the opium trade.[18] Growth statistics during the reign of the Taliban would seem to imply that initially, the Taliban were not interested in opium, neither in halting its growth or harvesting the profits. Some Afghans would argue that the Taliban as a government in the 1990's were not involved in the opium trade due to their adherence to the fundamental tenets on Islam - there is not much evidence to prove or disprove the theory. That all changed in 2001 when the Taliban banned opium production; superficially, the ban was marketed as a religious edict since the use of drugs is against Islam, and as concession to the international community in order to reduce the export of Afghan opiates.[19] On the contrary, it was the consummation of the current relationship between drug traffickers, Taliban and other anti-government elements. One can argue that the Taliban banned opium production as a means to increase the price and profit, and when examining the statistics it is easy to see how the 2001 ban caused a dramatic and long lasting price increase for opium. The price of

fresh opium jumped from $28 (US) per kilogram in 2000 to an astronomical $301 (US) in 2001 – more than 10 times the previous cost. Two years after the ban, prices leveled off and have remained fairly constant in the range of $95 - $100 (US) per kilogram; however, there are some recent signs of decreasing opium prices.[20] Nonetheless, the overall effect of the 2001 Taliban ban on opium production has merited a tremendous net profit for the drug lords of Afghanistan.

One might ask whether farmers then grow poppy specifically to fund the Taliban. Research has shown that not to be the case, and the majority of Afghans grow opium strictly as a matter of economic necessity.[21] It is important at this juncture to note that farmers in and of themselves are not specifically operating in an enemy capacity, at least in any manner they seem to be aware of. If the farmer is not the enemy then who is? A compelling number of sources ranging from the UNODC, the Afghan President, and US military commanders have noted that the enemy is in fact both the anti-government elements and the drug lords.

Both drug lords and anti-government elements require a destabilized/insecure environment in which to operate, therefore it behooves a certain degree of cooperation as noted by the UNODC.[22] It is critical here to draw the operational link between the Taliban and other anti-governmental forces and the drug lords; if true, then it is imperative for US policies and efforts to reflect this linkage. US Representative Mrs. Ros-Lehtinen, ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, claims Afghan drug producers and smugglers use their illicit proceeds "to finance terrorism, the killing of coalition forces and corrupting the new Afghan democratic institutions." Representative Ros-Lehtinen says that the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) has

shown her information detailing that of the agency's 21 high-value targets, 17 have links to the Taliban and that 16 of the 17 are grouped in the country's volatile south, where the insurgency remains the most viable.[23] Additionally, the Commander of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan (ISAF) General Dan McNeill estimates that Afghanistan's opium economy funds 40 to 60 percent of the insurgency.[24] The CRS Report to Congress lays out a clear and compelling view to show how narcotics are linked to anti-government elements as shown below. Therefore, one must address whether or not our strategy, policy and efforts reflect this fact.

Afghan Extremists	***Are they receiving money from the drug trade?***	***Do traffickers provide them with logistical support?***	***Are they telling farmers to grow opium poppy?***
Hizb-I Islami/Gulbuddin (HIG)	Almost definitely	Most likely	Probably
Taliban	Almost definitely	Most likely	
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)	Probably	Probably	Possibly
Al Qaeda	Possibly	Probably	

Table 1 – Extremists' Link to the Drug Trade[25]

Examining Current Strategy and Policy

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to differentiate between strategy and policy in order to further develop concepts. According to Webster, strategy can be defined as "a careful plan or method; a clever stratagem, or the art of devising or employing plans or stratagems toward a goal."[26] Policy is defined as "a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions."[27] Essentially then, policies are ways of acting or behaving within the framework of a strategy in order to achieve a specific

goal. If a chosen strategy is sound, then it is imperative for the subordinate policies to allow maximum effort within the strategic framework in order to attain the desired goals. Given the distinction, it is instructive to examine the existing counter narcotic strategies in place by the Afghan and US governments. Both the US and Afghan strategies have had a fair amount of favorable international scrutiny and both address almost every facet of the narcotics issue, therefore the strategies are considered sound for purposes of subsequent policy analysis.[28]

US Drug Control Strategy "Five Pillars"	***Afghan National Drug Control Strategy "Eight Pillars"***
Public Information	***Public Information*** - Inform, educate, deter and dissuade the population from involvement in the illicit drugs trade, cultivation of opium and abuse of opiates.
Alternative Development	***Alternative Development*** - Strengthen and diversify 'alternative livelihoods' that free farmers and other rural workers from dependence on opium cultivation and encourages growth of the licit economy.
Elimination/Eradication	***Eradication*** - Build the capacity to conduct targeted and verified ground-based eradication.
Interdiction	***Interdiction/Law Enforcement*** – Establish institutional capacity to increase drug trafficking risk through law enforcement.
Law Enforcement/Justice Reform	***Prosecution/Criminal Justice Reform*** - Establish an effective criminal justice system that can support drug law enforcement.
	Demand Reduction - Reduce Afghan demand for drugs and offer addicts treatment.
	Institution Building - Build CN institutions that provide for effective governance at the center and in the provinces.
	International and Regional Cooperation – Improve International and Regional Cooperation to disrupt the flow of illicit drugs and precursor materials across borders.

Table 2 – US and Afghan Counter-Narcotic Strategies[29]

The US Strategy consists of five pillars as noted above, which directly compliment five of the eight Afghan pillars. Although not stated as a core portion or pillar of US

strategy, US efforts also assist the remaining three Afghan pillars, if only in an indirect manner. The table above serves as a summary of counter-narcotic strategies with a brief description shown only for the Afghan strategy, since US definitions are fairly synonymous. There is no need to differentiate between the two. The strategies are important, as all resources and efforts should logically flow forth from the strategy, and be reflected in subordinate policy.

US strategy is directly related to Afghan strategy – that is indisputable. The question becomes whether or not subordinate US Departments and Agencies have policy that properly align in order to allow strategic achievement. For purposes of this discussion, only Department of Defense policy will be analyzed to determine if it is synchronous with US Strategy.

The US Department of Defense (DoD) counter-narcotics policy is fairly specific, and an underlying theme is to let other US Agencies that specialize in criminal and drug activity, execute their core functions; the DoD will assist when and where practical.[30] The Department of Defense counter narcotic policy focuses on two main lines – one internal and the other externally focused. The internal program is “demand reduction” which focuses only on DoD personnel and reducing their use of narcotics; this internal program is not relevant for further exploration given the scope of this paper. The external program, known as “supply reduction programs” focuses on what the DoD can provide to others.[31] The guidance is stated as follows: the Department will implement “supply reduction programs that collect, analyze and disseminate intelligence, support interdiction operations, and train host nation counternarcotics forces.”[32]

Further, on July 31, 2002, the Department of Defense defined "counterdrug activities" as "Those measures taken to detect, interdict, disrupt, or curtail any activity that is reasonably related to narcotics trafficking. This includes, but is not limited to, measures taken to detect, interdict, disrupt, or curtail activities related to substances, materiel, weapons, or resources used to finance, support, secure, cultivate, process, or transport illegal drugs".[33] Additionally, Section 1004 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) allows the DoD to assist foreign military, law enforcement and intelligence agencies, and domestic law enforcement. This assistance (with certain restrictions) includes:

- The maintenance, repair, or upgrading of equipment;
- Transportation of personnel;
- Establishment of bases of operations or training facilities;
- Detection, monitoring, and communication of trafficking activities;
- Construction of roads, fences, and lighting installations;
- Establishment of C4 networks;
- Provision of linguist and intelligence analysis services; and
- Aerial and ground reconnaissance.[34]

Upon examination of existing DoD policy, it appears fairly liberal, allowing an almost carte-blanche in terms of intelligence support. Policy also seems fairly open-ended for interdiction operations, as there are no clearly defined qualifications or clauses. These general policies can be further restricted within a theater of operations and are more clearly defined under the rules of engagement, which are normally classified. One facet that seems glaringly absent from all of the above definitions is the specific term eradication. By omission then, the Department of Defense does not

participate in active eradication. The policies do not specifically preclude providing assistance to eradication efforts in an indirect manner, and this option seems open to some interpretation. NATO troops operating in Afghanistan under the auspices of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) are precluded from active counter-narcotics operations.[35] This policy is currently being re-examined and senior NATO leaders have pledged their fullest support to counter-narcotics efforts. According to ISAF Commander, General Dan McNeill, NATO Commanders in Europe asked him to step up the counter-narcotics fight and to use the ISAF mandate to its fullest – to which McNeill replied, "I will."[36] With this in mind, US forces must then be allowed to participate in operations focused on countering narcotics to the fullest extent of US DoD policy. It is worthwhile to look at DoD policy to determine what rough parameters guide US forces given the current strategies.

When comparing the authorizations of the DoD counter narcotic policy versus current US Counter-Narcotic Strategy, there is a fair degree of congruence as shown in the table below. The table reflects general terms and is meant for a quick glimpse to determine where efforts can possibly be applied. US strategy will be used as the benchmark with which to compare DoD policy.

US Drug Control Strategy	***DoD Policy Authorizations***
Public Information	No specific focus or limitations; can support based on interpretation
Alternative Development	No specific focus or limitations; generally not within the scope of DoD efforts, but forces can provide some limited support
Elimination/Eradication	Eradication clearly not within purview of DoD; indirect assistance through other means open to interpretation
Interdiction	Specifically allowed by DoD policy
Law Enforcement/Justice Reform	Support to law enforcement agencies specifically allowed through collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence

Table 3 – DoD Policy and US Strategy[37]

The US and Afghan strategies are sound, and as shown above, DoD policy seems to allow efforts within most of the strategic framework; however those efforts must be focused more clearly and in a holistic manner. Again, it is critical at this point to bear in mind and understand the clear linkages between the Taliban/AGE and the drug lords. Once the true linkages are understood, it becomes inevitable then to accept the prudence behind redirecting or refocusing military assets at the operational and tactical level in order to achieve overall strategic goals. One way to look at the focus of military assets is to analyze the "Narcotics Cycle" and thereby exert efforts at the right time and place. This is where the US military can and should do more, within the current DoD policy constraints.

The Narcotics Cycle

The term narcotics cycle is a recognition that the production of opium occurs in a cyclic manner, with many distinct phases.[38] These recognizable phases, can be targeted along the strategic lines in either the US or Afghan counter narcotic strategy, while staying within the bounds of DoD policy. The narcotics cycle is described here as having five distinct phases: (1) planting, (2) growth, (3) harvest, (4) processing, and (5) export. At certain junctures there can be an associated movement, transit, or other key indicator which may be used to focus effort. The timing of the narcotics cycle varies across the regions in Afghanistan based on the local weather conditions; in some areas such as Nangarhar Province, a farmer can often grow and harvest two complete crops of opium within one year's time.[39] Therefore, any focused efforts that use the narcotics cycle must take into account the local conditions and timing as they are slightly different in each province.[40] It must be recognized that some phases overlap, or occur

throughout the year. For example, harvested opium has a fairly long shelf life and as a result, processing can occur at any time of the cycle using stored raw opium.[41] This has implications for indicators which will be looked at in more detail shortly. For purposes of this paper, the narcotics cycle and associated US military efforts will be examined in sequential order, beginning with the planting phase.

Planting Phase

The planting phase is critical, and once planting has occurred, the cycle will play itself out unless the poppy is eradicated or some other form of interdiction occurs. A key component in this phase is the farmer's decision on whether or not to grow poppy. Examining the reasons why farmers do or do not grow poppy allows one to target this phase properly. According to the UNODC, the preponderance of farmers decided to grow opium poppy for purely economic reasons. In 2007, 82.4 percent of opium growing farmers indicated that they did so because opium offered the best economic incentives, and 98 percent of opium growing farmers reported that they would stop if a viable economic alternative were available. Less than 9 percent grew opium for other reasons including low input costs for seed, personal use, and external influence.[42] Farmers who chose not to grow opium had a larger degree of variance in their reasoning why. The UNODC determined that 26.7 percent chose not to grow because doing so is *haram*. An additional 16.1 percent yielded to the decisions of the local elders not to grow poppy, while another 16 percent feared eradication and the associated loss of all profit. Roughly 20 percent did not grow poppy because they recognized it as an illegal crop and feared imprisonment.[43] Since the decision to grow is so clearly linked to economic reasoning, one can postulate that farmers who decided not to grow most likely had

recourse to other economic means; this becomes important when delving into solutions involving economic alternative livelihoods and their absolute necessity.[44]

In order to target farmers before planting opium poppy, the first two pillars of US and Afghan Drug Control Strategy (Public Information and Alternative Development) are key. When looking at DoD policy and the real world constraints facing US forces, there are limited means available to support. That being said, US forces can have an impact specifically in the public information arena. Recalling that 16.1 percent[45] decided not to grow opium due to the local elders' request, US forces can and must work hard with local elders and the ruling *shura* to convince them not to grow poppy. Although leveraging elders must be an unceasing event, it is intuitive that the major thrust must occur in sufficient time prior to planting season, in order for local farmers to attain seeds and plant alternate crops. Further, US Forces can and must echo the Afghan government position that farmers who grow poppy will likely have their crops eradicated and face criminal charges. Although seemingly benign in nature, these public information efforts are important in achieving the overall strategic goals.

The Afghan government clearly recognizes the need for alternative development and livelihoods as stated in the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy, "No sustainable reduction in cultivation, achieved either through self-restraint or eradication, will be possible until farmers have access to sufficient legal livelihoods."[46] Alternative development is truly in the realm of international organizations like the World Bank, and other US government agencies such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Recently the World Bank and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) called for increased international aid to Afghanistan in

order to stem the growth of poppy, in the amount of $2 billion dollars, noting that opium cultivation “can only be combated if the country's impoverished farmers have other means of making a living.”[47]

Clearly, US forces do not have expertise or access to funds in the magnitude required to achieve alternative development and livelihood in the scope envisioned by the World Bank. However, US Forces can easily work in conjunction with international organizations and ensure unity of effort in the expenditure of their (US forces) limited funds, known as Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP).[48] US forces, under the auspices of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) must coordinate and have regular reconstruction meetings with all key organizations in order to better synchronize reconstruction efforts.[49] For example, PRTs can focus reconstruction effort in critical areas where International Organizations (IOs) deem security is not yet adequate for their operations, and the selected projects can compliment the efforts of IOs and other government organizations. US combat forces – which are to be distinguished from PRTs for mission purposes - can focus combat and security operations in regions that are on the cusp of the security levels required by IOs to operate; once security reaches the requisite level, IOs can then begin executing robust alternative development/livelihood efforts. These operations - coordinating reconstruction efforts and focusing security operations in critical areas - are authorized under existing DoD policy and if executed solely by US forces, will not likely yield much progress; however, if done in conjunction with the other key contributors from the international community, these efforts would bear much fruit.

Growth Phase

The growth cycle is fairly benign – it occurs over a period of months in most Afghan regions and not much activity is associated with this cycle with the exception of required irrigation. The growth phase is where the strategic pillar of eradication logically and normally takes place. Afghan forces dedicated to this mission are under the control of the Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) and include the Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) and the Special Counter Narcotics Police. The AEF is a national capable force that focuses on areas deemed more hostile and responds to MCN requests for eradication support.[50] The Poppy Eradication Program (PEP) runs under the auspices of the Governor Led Eradication (GLE) program and focuses eradication efforts within a given province, focused on the Provincial Governor's targeted areas.[51] Many argue that Afghans are preoccupied with the eradication pillar of their counter-narcotic strategy. Clearly at the district and provincial level this is the case.[52] Some believe this is the case because politicians at most every level are intertwined in the opium trade, and focusing on eradication allows for targeted efforts that do not completely disrupt the politicians illegal opium income, limiting the severe hardship to only select, localized, and non-empowered individuals.[53]

Eradication during the growth cycle can become hazardous, and quite often these forces are engaged by farmers, drug lords, Taliban, or any combination thereof. For some farmers, eradication signals an economic death knell. Afghans often have a volatile reaction to eradication. Indeed, many Afghans see the counter-narcotics efforts as a foreign-led or caused phenomenon, and are openly hostile due to this inherent tension.[54] The effect then of having US forces directly eradicate would seem to be untenable from either an Afghan or US perspective. It is not unfortunate then, that DoD

and ISAF policy does not allow US forces to directly participate in eradication efforts. This policy seems prudent; however there are many things US forces can do during the growth phase and associated local eradication effort. US forces can leverage technological advantages during this phase of the narcotics cycle and also leverage targeted security operations to enhance eradication forces.

In terms of using technology to enable eradication efforts, DoD policy encourages the collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence, and US forces have many assets at their disposal. Signals intelligence may be utilized to intercept critical Taliban or other drug related communications which could be used to direct eradication forces, provide necessary intelligence to tailor an eradication force with heavier weapons, or to postpone planned operations until a more opportune time. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) can be used to identify areas of heavy poppy growth, to include gathering video footage of proper approaches for eradication forces and likely enemy defensive positions. In addition, UAVs can be used to validate claimed eradication efforts, especially in areas that the UNODC or other verification entities deem too dangerous to enter.

US combat forces may also execute security operations using an indirect method to enhance eradication efforts. Active combat patrolling within a reasonable radius from eradication sites would thwart enemy fighters who might try to reinforce or interdict eradication forces. Further, US combat forces operating within a reasonable radius would be able to provide in extremis combat support to eradication forces. This is currently authorized under DoD policy. Any of the above operations require a great degree of cooperation with Afghan eradication forces, whether they are nationally or

provincial based. It is critical to coordinate these efforts through the use of recurring targeting or counter-narcotics synchronization meetings with all key players. It is imperative that intelligence is shared as generously as possible – a balance must be found between operational security and operational effectiveness. This is clearly a challenge, but is not insurmountable.

Harvest Phase

The harvest phase is a labor intensive process and many Afghan leaders feel their counter-narcotic efforts have failed if the opium reaches this stage.[55] Eradication efforts during the harvest season can be particularly dangerous. The presence of anti-government elements and drug lords increases during this phase, as many require repayment of loans in raw opium.[56] Eradication may occur during the harvest phase, and if and when it does, US forces can provide the same type of support as noted in the growth phase. The harvest phase is perhaps best associated with the strategic pillar, interdiction. Of note, the harvest phase has associated movement or transit of the raw opium to local or distant markets. US forces can contribute in this phase by once again leveraging intelligence assets - to include human intelligence sources - in order to determine the most likely transit routes, times, and methods from farm to market. Once identified, US forces can then execute more aggressive security patrols and assist Afghan forces – be they Afghan National Police, Army, or Special Counter Narcotics Police – using combined interdiction operations. US forces can offer assistance in proper search techniques and can also serve as honest brokers if and when raw opium is confiscated, to ensure it goes to the proper authorities and is adequately documented. Particular attention should be placed on the opium markets using

intelligence assets to identify the transit routes, determine the market operational tempo, and assist Afghan forces conducting interdiction or raid operations. Interdiction operations have priority in this phase, and as previously mentioned it is of vital importance to coordinate all intelligence and activity for maximum effectiveness.

Processing Phase

The processing phase is where raw opium becomes the drug heroin – this occurs in drug labs which are generally in remote areas.[57] The interdiction pillar remains foremost during this phase. Processing is distinct as it requires large amounts of water, large quantities of very dangerous precursor chemicals, and large quantities of fire wood. Drug labs may be found both inside and outside Afghanistan and are generally protected by armed and dangerous individuals when active. US intelligence assets should allow forces to identify drug lab locations, specifically through the use of human and image intelligence. UAVs then can be used to validate those locations as well as the type of defensive measures found on the site. During a weekly counter-narcotics targeting/synchronization meeting, this information can be shared with the proper Afghan authorities in order to plan, prepare and execute operations to eliminate the drug lab. It will be reiterated here that raw opium has a long shelf life and can be stored for processing throughout the cycle or season. As such, the processing phase may occur throughout the year, although it is logical that processing efforts would peak immediately following the harvest phase due to the sheer influx of raw opium. Therefore, and despite obvious peak periods, military assistance to interdiction operations should remain an ongoing venture.

The most common chemicals used for the processing of heroin are: acetic anhydride, ammonium chloride, hydrochloric acid, and lime.[58] With the exception of lime, there are very few legitimate purposes for these precursor chemicals in the remote Afghan areas, and when detected, they are most likely an indicator of a nearby drug lab. Afghanistan does not have the ability to manufacture her own precursor chemicals, and therefore, must import them from regional neighbors. Given the quantity of chemicals required, and the likelihood they would come from a more industrialized nation such as Pakistan, it is logical that these interdiction efforts would occur at larger border crossing regions. Efforts should occur under the purview of the Afghan Border Patrol and special emphasis should be made to test all inbound chemical to account for the inevitable masking techniques, such as false packaging.

Again, US forces can help identify likely transit routes and execute targeted security and search operations in conjunction with Afghan Border Patrol and other forces to interdict the import of precursor chemicals. Furthermore, certain US forces have specialized chemical troops with the knowledge and wherewithal to deal with these very dangerous chemicals, should they become compromised.[59]

Export Phase

The export phase consists of moving the processed opium, now heroin, to markets. Counter-narcotics efforts during this phase focus more heavily on the law enforcement spectrum of strategy, although clearly, interdiction still occurs. The preponderance of Afghan heroin moves into Europe and Asia; those regions are particularly keen to reduce the amount of heroin coming into their borders, and they play a critical role in international law enforcement and interdiction efforts once the heroin

has departed Afghanistan.[60] The use of *hawaladars* for moving illicit opium funds increases the challenge of law enforcement as previously noted. Once opium has reached the stage where it is processed heroin and inbound to another country, then arguably, the *in-situ* counter-narcotics efforts have failed. US forces can do very little during the export phase of the Afghan narcotics cycle and counter-narcotics efforts should logically fall under the purview of other, more specialized US and international agencies. That being said, in accordance with DoD policy, US forces can continue to collect, analyze, and disseminate intelligence from their various sources and share it with all involved parties.

All of the above listed activities are permitted in some form under the existing DoD counter-drug policy and it is not difficult to provide examples of when, where and how US forces can assist in the counter-narcotic effort in Afghanistan. However, what must happen first is the realization, and more importantly, the acknowledgement that the fight against narcotics is intrinsically linked to the fight against the Taliban and other extremists. This acknowledgement must then lead to a tangible commitment of scarce and critical assets in the fight against narcotics. Actions taken alone by US Forces would be negligible and most likely serve as a mere pinprick in the overall counter-narcotics strategy; therefore, US forces must coordinate and synchronize activity with all involved counter-narcotics forces in order to make a real difference.

<u>Recommendations</u>

1. Ensure commanders at the tactical and operational level understand, and acknowledge the nexus between drug traffickers and enemy combatants. This realization has already occurred at the strategic level.

2. Develop operational and tactical plans that commit scarce and critical assets towards the counter-narcotics fight. Focus those plans around the narcotics cycle in each opium infested province (Helmand, Nangarhar, et al). This implies developing and understanding the narcotics cycle in each specific province.
3. Coordinate operations from strategic to tactical level with recurring counter-narcotics targeting/intelligence synchronization meetings including all relevant counter-narcotics forces.
4. In accordance with emerging ISAF policy, execute counter-narcotics operations allowed under existing DoD policy to the fullest extent possible.

Conclusion

The existing US and Afghan counter-narcotics strategies are sound, and the subordinate Department of Defense counter-drug policy is aligned properly within that strategy to allow effective operations. US forces currently are not executing counter-narcotic operations to the fullest extent possible, and this can and must change. Change will occur once there is a clear understanding of the nexus between drug traffickers and enemy forces. Fighting one truly impacts the other. By coordinating counter-narcotic activities with all vested partners, US forces can make a tremendous difference and allow Afghanistan to move back from the brink of her narcotic abyss.

Endnotes

[1] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007, Executive Summary," vii, August 2007; available from http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan-Opium-Survey-2007.pdf; Internet; accessed 12 November, 2007.

[2] *NBC Nightly News*, interview with Jim Maceda, 27 April 2007.

[3] Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IRoA) Ministry of Counter-Narcotics, "National Drug Control Strategy – An Updated Five Year Strategy for Tackling the Illicit Drug Problem," 4 January 2006; available from http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/NDCSfinal%20_Jan% 202006,0.pdf; Internet; accessed 12 November, 2007.

[4] Christopher M. Blanchard, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy, Updated September 14, 2007*, Congressional Research Service presented to Congress, 23, 37, available from http://italy.usembassy.gov/policy/crs; Internet; accessed 15 December 2007.

[5] IRoA, "National Drug Control Strategy," 4.

[6] UNODC, "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007, Executive Summary," 1.

[7] Ibid., vi. The publication submits that 2/5 of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan became "opium free" in 2007.

[8] IRoA, "National Drug Control Strategy," 32.

[9] *NBC Nightly News*.

[10] David Mansfield, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, "Water Management, Livestock, and the Opium Economy", December 2006, 8, available from http://www.drugpolicy.org/library/index.cfm?keywordID=5; Internet; accessed 15 December 2007.

[11] Blanchard, 3. The majority of the statistics used by Blanchard come from the UNODC and their extensive presence and research on Afghanistan's opium economy. The CRS report however, provided a very clear and concise snapshot.

[12] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Afghanistan's Drug Industry: Structure, Functioning, Dynamics, and Implications for Counter-Narcotics Policy," 155, available from http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Afgh_drugindustry_Nov06.pdf; Internet; accessed 12 November 2007.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ambassador Thomas A. Schweich, Coordinator for Counter-Narcotics and Justice, Reform in Afghanistan:U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan – August 2007, 28, available from http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/rpt/90561.htm; Internet; accessed 12 November 2007.

[15] Schweich,15. See also Inspectors General (US DoS, DoD) Interagency Assessment of the Counternarcotics Program in Afghanistan, July 2007, available from http://www.oid.state.gov/documents/organization/90165.pdf; Internet; accessed 12 November 2007.

[16] Authors personal notes from OEF VII/VIII from 2 April 2007. Notes are from a meeting with Nangarhar Governor Gul Agha Sherrzai, Provincial Council members and the Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team, reference poppy eradication efforts. Additional reference is available from David Mansfield, "Beyond the Metrics: Understanding the Nature of Change in the Rural Livelihoods of Opium Poppy Growing Households in the 2006/2007 Growing Season,"

May 2007, 29, available from http://www.drugpolicy.org/library/index.cfm?keywordID=5; Internet; accessed 12 November 2007.

[17] United Kingdom Department for International Development, "Fighting Corruption in Afghanistan – A Roadmap for Strategy and Action," available from http://www.unodc.org/pdf/afg/anti_corruption_roadmap.pdf; Internet; accessed 12 November 2007.

[18] Schweich, 16, 30.

[19] Ibid.

[20] UNODC, "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007, Executive Summary."

[21] UNODC, "Afghanistan's Drug Industry," 17.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Jerry Seper, "DEA's Targets Tied to Taliban", *Washington Times*, 23 October, 2007, p. 6.

[24] "Opium Funding Afghan Unrest", *Washington Times*, 19 October 2007, p. 15.

[25] Blanchard, 16. This table is in much less detail than can be found in the CRS report to Congress. The original source is former Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Robert Charles in his testimony before the House Committee on Government Reform, April 1, 2004.

[26] *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, available from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/strategy; Internet; accessed 15 December 2007.

[27] *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, available at http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/policy; Internet; accessed 15 December 2007.

[28] Schweich, 23.

[29] Table is the author's condensed version of the more elaborate strategies as put forth in the respective Nations capstone Counter-Narcotics Strategies previously cited in footnotes 3, 15.

[30] "Department of Defense Counter-narcotics Policy," available from http://www.defenselink.mil/ policy/sections/policy_offices/solic/cn/policy.html; Internet; accessed 15 December 2007. See also Blanchard, CRS Report to Congress, 37.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] *National Defense Authorization Act*, sect. 1004, available from http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/15may20061514/www.gpoaccess.gov/serialset/creports/pdf/hr109-452/title10.pdf; Internet; accessed on 15 December 2007.

[35] Blanchard, 37.

[36] Jason Straziuso, "NATO General Vows to Intensify Afghan Drug Fight," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 January 2008.

[37] Table is author's compilation and comparison of the basic tenets of US Strategy versus the DoD policy limitations. Comparison is done using generalities, and specific operations may require legal review before their undertaking. Data is taken from the base documents for US Strategy and DoD policy as previously cited.

[38] Authors notes from OEF VII/VIII from 2 April 2007. Narcotics Cycle is a term developed by the author to describe the cyclic nature of opium growth through harvest to assist the Nangarhar Governor (Sherrzai) in his eradication efforts. The cycles are based on activities associated with the different phases of opium growth and heroin production, and are the author's way of understanding the problem in order to target efforts in a holistic manner.

[39] Mansfield, 8.

[40] Ibid.

[41] UNODC, "Afghanistan's Drug Industry," 11.

[42] UNODC, "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007, Executive Summary". Percentages are compiled from charts provided in the executive summary.

[43] Ibid.

[44] UNODC, Afghan Drug Industry. Research has clearly shown that farmers who once cultivated poppy but no longer do, overwhelmingly had access to alternate economic means mainly through access to markets via roads and other infrastructure.

[45] UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007, Executive Summary," 14.

[46] IRoA, "National Drug Control Strategy," 16.

[47] Press release from the United Kingdom, Department for International Development, available from www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/pressreleases/better-afghan-livelihoods.asp; Internet; accessed 15 January 2008. Additional information can be found via the World Bank, which co-authored the report, available from http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/0,,contentMDK:21636749~pagePK:146736~piPK:146830~theSitePK:223547,00.html; Internet; accessed 15 January 2008.

[48] The Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) allows local commanders the ability to pay for small, localized projects to assist in times of emergency circumstances. These funds are available with particular limitations for use, and can be used to augment other construction efforts to achieve specific results. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams have access to other funds to build larger more complex projects. Nonetheless, the use of the funds should be coordinated thoroughly to achieve maximum benefits.

[49] Author's notes from OEF VII/VIII. Specifically notes taken in regards to ongoing operations in Gardez where construction projects executed under the auspices of CERP were not coordinated with external bodies and were ineffective because of the lack of coordination.

[50] Ann Patterson, Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, testimony to House Committee on Appropriations, 12 September 2006, Washington DC.

[51] US Departments of State and Defense Inspectors General, "Interagency Assessment of the Counternarcotics Program in Afghanistan," July 2007, available from http://www.oid.state.gov/documents/organization/90165.pdf; Internet; accessed 15 January 2008.

[52] Blanchard, 38. This statement is also borne from the authors experience in OEF VII/VIII where great resistance was found for any counter-narcotics efforts beyond eradication.

[53] UNODC, "Afghanistan's Drug Industry: Structure, Functioning, Dynamics, and Implications for Counter-Narcotics Policy," 18, 20.

[54] Mansfield, 22.

[55] Author's notes from OEF VII/VIII during 2 April 2007 meeting with Nangarhar Governor Gul Agha Sherrzai in reference to a recent attack on ANP involved in eradication efforts.

[56] Mansfield, 14.

[57] Blanchard, 11.

[58] *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, "Heroin," available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heroin; Internet; accessed 12 December 2007. See also Table 4 – Substances Frequently Used in the Manufacture of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Chemical Precursors), IRoA Counter-Narcotics Drug Law, 17 December 2005.

[59] US Army units in particular have chemical soldiers that are organic at the Brigade level. Soldiers trained in HAZMAT through any "Technical Escort" course and corresponding HAZMAT accreditation are well trained to handle incidents involving these chemicals given the proper equipment. On 18 May 2006, 7,000 liters of precursor chemicals were improperly disposed of in the vicinity of the author's forward operating base and Soldiers from the authors Battalion, the 3rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion were flown in to remediate the situation. See also, American Chemistry Magazine, September/October 2006 Issue for a related article.

[60] Blanchard, 18.